

Pam
Mac
NRE
Pam

1652

Missions and Civilization

By the Hon. William H. Taft

*An Address delivered at
Carnegie Music Hall, New York,
under the auspices of the
Laymen's Missionary Movement,
April 20, 1908*

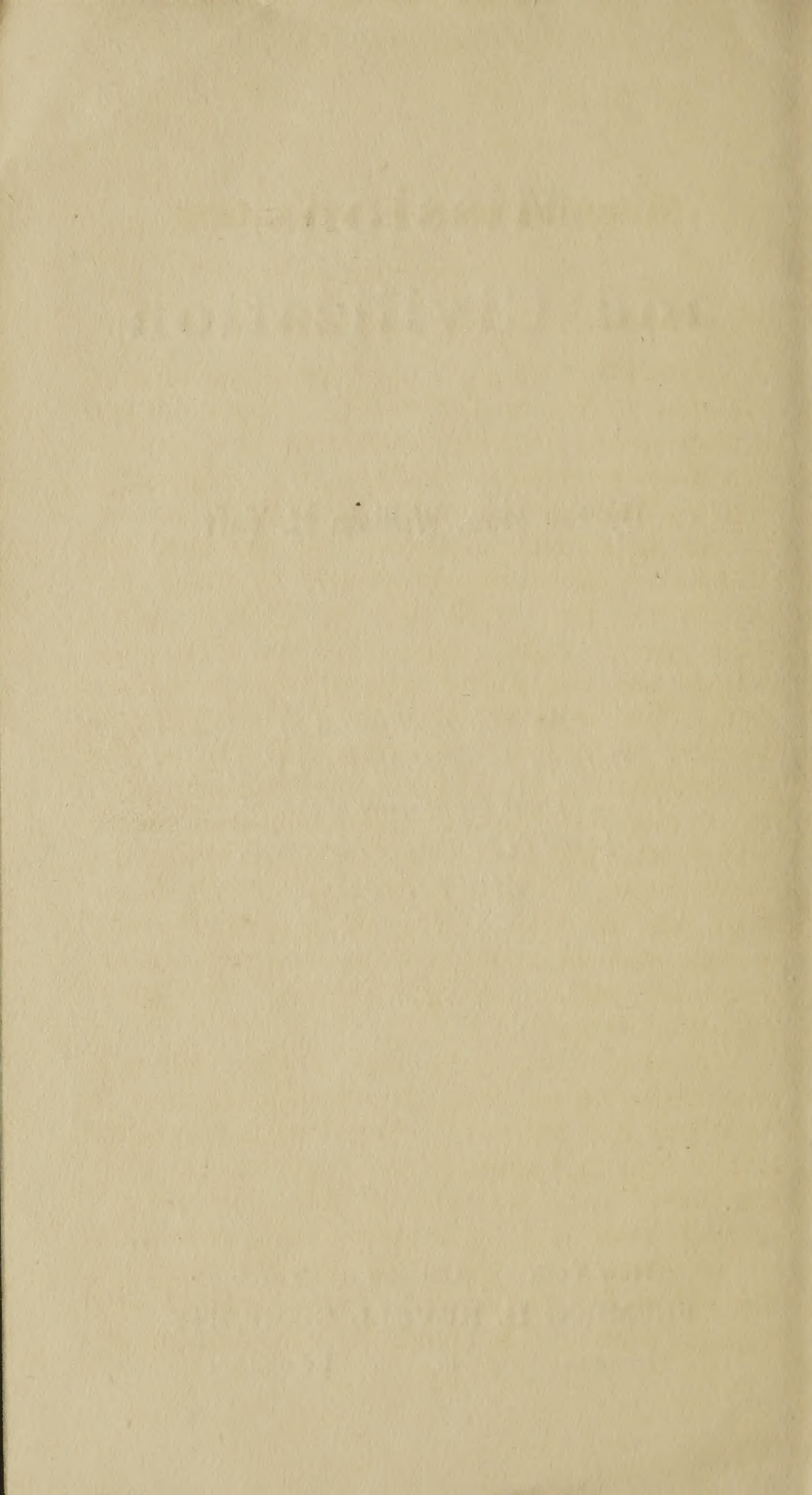
New York Chicago Toronto
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY
London ::: Edinburgh

Missions and Civilization

By the Hon. William H. Taft

*An address delivered at
Carnegie Music Hall, New York,
under the auspices of the
Laymen's Missionary Movement,
April 20, 1908*

New York	Chicago	Toronto
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY		
London	:::	Edinburgh



Missions and Civilization

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have known a good many people who were opposed to foreign missions. I have known a good many regular attendants at church—consistent members—perhaps, that religiously, if you choose to use that term, refused to contribute to foreign missions. It has been the custom in literature sometimes to make fun of them. You remember in Dickens when Sam Weller came home, and saw Tony, his father, and the widow whom Tony had married. The widow and the Rev. Stiggins framed an indictment against Tony, on the ground that he would not contribute any money to pay for “flannel waistcoats and moral pocket handkerchiefs” for little infants in the West Indies. He said they were little humbugs, and he said, moreover, in an undertone to Sam, that he could come down pretty handsome for some “straight veskits” for some people at home.

I confess that there was a time when I was enjoying a snug provincialism, that I hope has left me now, when I rather sympathized with that view. Until I went to the Orient, until there was thrust upon me the responsibilities with reference to the extension of civilization in those far distant lands, I did not realize the immense importance of foreign missions. The truth is, we have got to

wake up in this country. We are not all there is in the world. There are lots besides us, and there are lots of people besides us that are entitled to our effort and our money and our sacrifice to help them on in the world. Now no man can study the movement of modern civilization from an impartial standpoint, and not realize that Christianity and the spread of Christianity are the only basis for hope of modern civilization in the growth of popular self-government. The spirit of Christianity is pure democracy. It is the equality of man before God—the equality of man before the law, which is, as I understand it, the most God-like manifestation that man has been able to make.

I am not here to-night to speak of foreign missions from a purely religious standpoint. That has been done and will be done. I am here to speak of it from the standpoint of political governmental advancement, the advancement of modern civilization, and I think I have had some opportunity to know how dependent we are on the spread of Christianity for any hope we may have of uplifting the peoples whom Providence has thrust upon us for our guidance. Foreign missions began a long time ago. In the Philippines, in 1565 to 1571, there were five Augustinian friars that came out by direction of Felipe Second, charged with the duty under Legaspi of Christianizing those islands. By the greatest good luck they reached there just before the time when the Mohammedans were thinking of going into the same place, and they spread Christianity through those islands with no violence but in the true spirit of Christian missionaries.

They taught the natives of those islands agriculture. They taught them peace and the arts of peace, and so it came about that the only people as a body that are Christians in the whole Orient are the Filipino people of the Christian provinces of the Philippines, seven million souls. I dwell upon this because it is the basis of the whole hope of success that we have in our problem in those islands. It is true that those people were not developed beyond the point of Christian tutelage. Those old missionaries felt that it was not wise to expose those people to the temptations of the knowledge which European Christians have, and so they were kept in a state of ignorance, but nevertheless they were Christians, and for three hundred years have been under that influence. In this condition of Christian tutelage, their ideals are western, their ideals are European, their ideals are Christian, and they understand us. When we attempt to unfold to them the theories and the doctrine of self-government, of democracy, they are fit material, to make, in two or three generations, because they are Christians, a self-governing people. We have the opportunity to know, because we have got a million non-Christians there—we have 400,000 or 500,000 Moham-medans, and they don't understand republican government. They don't understand popular government. They welcome a despotism, and they never will sustain popular self-government until they have been converted to Christianity.

I suppose I ought not to go into a discussion here of our business in the Philippines, but I never can take up that subject without point-

ing the moral. It is my conviction that our nation is just as much charged with the obligation to help the unfortunate peoples of other countries that are thrust upon us by fate, onto their feet and to become self-governing people, as it is the business of the wealthy and fortunate in a community to help the infirm and the unfortunate of that community.

It is said that there is nothing in the Constitution of the United States that authorizes national altruism of that sort. Well, of course there is not; but there is nothing in the Constitution of the United States that forbids it. What there is in the Constitution of the United States is a breathing spirit that we are a nation with all the responsibilities that any nation ever had, and therefore when it becomes the Christian duty of a nation to assist another nation, the Constitution authorizes it because it is part of national well-being.

We went into the Cuban War, and we did not go into it for conquest. We went in because we thought there was an international scandal that ought to be ended, and that we had some responsibility with respect to that scandal, if we could end it and did not end it. We passed a self-denying ordinance with respect to Cuba, but we found these other countries on our hands. I have been at the head of the Philippines, and I know what I am talking about when I say that the hope of those islands depends upon the development of the power in those islands of the churches that are there. One of the most discouraging things to-day is the poverty-stricken condition of the Roman Catholic Church, which has the largest congregations in those islands, and

every man, be he Protestant or Catholic, must in his soul hope for the prosperity of the Roman Catholic Church in those islands, in order that it may do the work that it ought to do in uplifting those people. Protestant missions in those islands are doing a grand and noble work. It may be that their congregations will not be as large as that of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not to be expected; but the spirit of Christian emulation, if I may use that term, of competition between the representatives of the churches there, has the grandest effect upon such agents of all the churches, and so indirectly upon the people; and it is the influence of the church upon a people as ignorant as they are, and of these churches that hold up the hands of the civil governor, charged as he is with the responsibility of maintaining peace and order, of inducing them to educate their children, and to go on upward on the path toward self-government. I am talking practical facts about the effect of religion on political government. I know what I am talking about. Foreign missions accomplish—I did not know it until I went into the Orient—a variety of things. They have reached the conclusion that in order to make a man a good Christian you have got to make him useful in the community and teach him something to do and give him some sense and intelligence. So, connected with every successful foreign mission is a school, ordinarily an industrial school. You have also got to teach them that cleanliness is next to Godliness, and that one business of his is to keep himself healthful; and so in connection with every good foreign mission they have

hospitals and doctors, and the mission makes a nucleus of modern civilization, with schools and teachers, a physician and a church, and in that way having educated the native, having taught him how to live, then they are able to be sure that they have made him a consistent Christian. Of course, it is said there are a great many rice Christians in China. Doubtless there are. Chinese don't differ from other people, and they are quite willing to admit a conversion they don't feel, in order that they may fill their stomachs; but the real fact is that every mission in China is a nucleus for the advancement of modern civilization. China is in a state of transition. China is looking forward to progress. China is to be guided by whom? It is to be guided by the young Christian students and scholars, that either learn English or some other foreign language at home, or are sent abroad to be instructed, and who come back, and whose words are listened to by those who exercise influence at the head of the government. Therefor it is that these frontier posts of civilization are so much more important than the mere numerical account of those who are converted, or those who yield allegiance to the foreign missions seems to make them, and I speak from the standpoint, as I say, of political civilization in such a country as China. They have I think some 3,000 missionaries in China. The number of students last year was 35,000. They go out into the neighborhood, and they cannot but have a good effect throughout that great Empire, large as it is, to promote the ideas of Christianity and the ideas of civilization.

Two or three things make one impatient

when he understands the facts. One is the criticism that the missionary is constantly involving governments in trouble and constantly bringing about war. The truth is that Western civilization in trade is pressing into the Orient, and the agents that are sent forward, I am sorry to say, are not the best representatives of Western civilization. The Americans and Englishmen and others who live in the Orient are many of them excellent, honest, God-fearing men, but there are in that set of advance agents of Western civilization, gentlemen who left the West for the good of the West, and because their history in the West might prove embarrassing at home. More than that, where there are honest, hard-working tradesmen and merchants attempting to push business into the Orient, their minds are constantly on business. It is not human nature that they should resist the temptations that not infrequently present themselves, to get ahead of the Oriental brother in business transactions. They generally are quite out of sympathy with a spirit of brotherhood toward the Oriental native. Even in the Philippines that spirit is shown, for while I was there I quite remember hearing on the streets a song of a gentleman who did not agree with my view of what we ought to do by the Filipinos, "He may be a brother of William H. Taft, but he ain't no brother of mine." That is the spirit that we are too likely to find among the gentlemen who go into the East for the mere purpose of extending trade.

Then I am bound to say that the restraints of public opinion that one finds at home to keep men in the straight and narrow path are

loosened in the Orient, and we find a number of foreigners not the models that they ought to be in probity and morality. They look upon the native as inferior, and they are too likely to treat him with contumely and insult. Hence it is that in the progress of civilization we must move on as trade moves on and as the foreign missions move on.

It is through the foreign missions that we must expect to have the true picture of Christian brotherhood presented to those natives, the true spirit of Christian sympathy. In the progress of civilization you can not over-estimate the immense importance of Christian missions. If in China to-day you try to find out what the conditions are in the interior, you consult in Peking the gentlemen who are supposed to know, and where do you go? You go at once to the missionaries, the men who have spent their lives far advanced into the nation, far beyond the point of safety if an uprising takes place, and who have learned by association with the natives, by living with them, by bringing them into their houses, by helping them on their feet, who have learned what the secret of Chinese life is; and therefore it is that the only reliable books that you can read telling you exactly the condition of Chinese civilization, are written by these foreign missionaries who have been so much blamed for involving us in foreign wars. It is said that the Boxer war was due to the interference of the missionaries and the feeling of the Chinese against the Christian religion as manifested and exemplified by the missionaries. That is not true. It is true that the first outbreak was against the missionaries,

because the outbreak was against foreign interferences, and it was easiest to attack those men who were furthest in the Chinese nation. But that which really aroused the opposition of the Chinese was that feeling that all of us Christian nations were sitting around waiting to divide up the middle kingdom and waiting to get our piece of the pork. Now that is the feeling that the Chinese have, and I am not prepared to say that there was not some ground for the suspicion.

I have described to you the character of some Americans in the cities of the Orient, in Shanghai and in others. It has improved. Our consular system has been greatly improved, and then we established a consular court of China or circuit court of the United States, and a man was put in there who had been attorney general in the Philippine Islands. He had some experience in dealing with these waifs that come around up the coast, go through one town and then go on up to another town. They left Manila and then after they left Manila they spent their time in condemning the government of Manila. We called them in Manila "Shanghai roosters." Wilfley went there as Judge of that court, and he found a condition of an Augean stable that needed cleaning out, so far as the Americans were concerned, and I think perhaps in this audience I would be able to call on witnesses who could testify to the condition of immorality that was carried on there under the protection of the American flag. We have extra-territorial jurisdiction in a concession made by the Chinese Government to us. Judge Wilfley went to work and be-

fore he got through the American flag floated over a moral community and in so doing he had the sympathy of the foreign missionaries who were in that neighborhood. But he has come home, and when you are a good many miles away facts are difficult to prove. Pictures are easy to paint in lurid colors of the tyranny of a Judge away off there, and he has been subjected to a great deal of criticism on that account. I want to give my personal testimony on the subject and in favor of his course. With this change in our diplomatic relations to China, by doing what was a plain, honest thing to do, and which as between nations seems to be a little more exceptional perhaps than between individuals—by agreeing to return the money that we really ought not to have taken, the indemnity, by the influence of our own foreign missionaries there, and by the belief in China that we are not there for our exploitation or to appropriate jurisdiction territorially or otherwise, I think we stand well in China to-day. I think we stand in such a position that such a movement as this, in order to raise money to increase the number of missionaries and the number of nuclei of Christianity and of civilization in that teeming population of 450,000,000 is better to-day than it ever was. Therefore such a movement as this must enlist the sympathy and aid of all who understand the great good that these self-denying men who go so far to accomplish their good are doing. You can read books (I have read them) in which the missions are described as most comfortable buildings, and it is said that they are living much more luxuriously than they are at home, and therefore that they

don't call for our support or sympathy. It is true that there are a good many mission buildings that are handsome buildings. I have seen them. It is true that they are comfortable, but they ought to be comfortable. One of the things that you have got to do with the Oriental is to fill his eye with something that he can see, and if you erect a great missionary building he deems the coming of the missionary into that community as of some importance and the missionary societies that are doing that and are building their own buildings for their missionaries are following a very much more sensible course than is the United States in denying to its representatives anything to shelter them. But it is not a life of ease; it is not a life of comfort and luxury. I don't know how many have felt that thing I think physicians call "nostalgia." I don't know whether you have experienced that sense of distance from home, that being surrounded by an alien people, that impression that if you could only have two hours of association with your old friends at home, if you could only get into a street car and sit down or hang by a strap, in order to be near your friends. I tell you when you come back after an absence of five or ten years, even the strap seems a dear old memory. Those men are doing a grand good work. I don't mean to say that there are not exceptions among them, that sometimes they don't make mistakes and sometimes they don't meddle in something which it would be better for them from a political standpoint to keep out of, but I mean as a whole, those 3,000 missionaries in China and those thousands in other countries worthily

represent the best Christian spirit of this country, and worthily are doing the work that you have sent them out to do.

I would like to talk a little about the difference between our colonial policy and its effect in China, and the colonial policy of other countries, but that is probably not germane to-night, and I am afraid if I did you would think I was using this opportunity as a means of airing my hobby.

I thank you for the opportunity of speaking on behalf of this body of Christian men and women who are doing a work which is indispensable to the spread of Christian civilization.

